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FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM Casper Citron Show STATION WRVR FM

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FULL TEXT

CASPER CITRON: Good evening. Casper Citron from the Algonquin Hotel, West 44th Street, here in New York City. A man whose name I think is known almost everywhere in the world, but up to now much has been misunderstood about him. His name, Francis Gary Powers; the book, "Operation Overflight", the U-2 spy pilot tells his story for the first time with Curt Gentry. It's published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston. And you know I was kidding with somebody, Gary, before you got here. I should say Francis Gary, but do you like to be called Francis or Gary?

FRANCIS GARY POWERS: Gary more people would recognize.

CITRON: Yeah. I was kidding that the book is so exciting, and it's such a great story, they might even make a movie about it.

POWERS: Well--

CITRON: I'm just kidding, because the whole thing is something we all went through with you, and the unfortunate part is that so many people, and I'm afraid I was included, had a misconception as to, you know, what went on, with the parts that we didn't know,

and certainly what comes out of this is that the CIA, which you call 'the Agency' not only went off halfbaked on much of this, they were really ludicrous at times.

POWERS: Well, they could have done two or three things that would have helped present me in a better light, and it would not have harmed them at the time. And this I have felt badly about for quite a while. But they also got me back to this country, and for that I'm very thankful; so I'm not trying to criticize....

CITRON: Well, I wasn't aware the CIA played a role in that. I thought this was more your father and Jim Gullivan(?) who'd been on this program before, who just died not too long ago, and the fact that Abel was here, and the contact with the Russians. I didn't realize that was a CIA deal.

POWERS: Well, I didn't know that it was a CIA deal, but they had a part in it.

CITRON: Um-hum.

POWERS: They, I think, did a lot of the negotiating some way or the other. Maybe not the negotiating but arranging. They--here again I think--wanted me back, and with the help of Donovan, FBI and whoever else was involved to get the exchange done. Now, I think the ideas for the exchange came from Donovan originally in his--during the trial, and before the sentencing of Colonel Abel. But then my dad jumped on the wagon, I think, early in May right after it was released that I was in Russian hands.

CITRON: Um-hum. I'd like to start at the beginning, but before that several things that really were ludicrous--I think probably the thing that caused the whole bit was the White House

giving you a goahead on the overflight from Turkey across the entire breadth of--

POWERS: Pakistan.

CITRON: Pakistan, I'm sorry. From Pakistan across the entire Soviet Union, around the north to a site in Norway. Giving you this okay just before the Summit; and you talk about this in the book, and you speculate that the only reason that you can figure you that they would have done it would have been to--for the United States to have wanted the talks to fail before they started, but of course that would be ridiculous.

POWERS: No, I don't say this now. In my book I say that I don't know the reason that they did this. The Russians said....

CITRON: Oh, the Russians said, yeah, that they thought this.

POWERS: ...that this was the reason. Well, I don't think that is the reason for the flight. Now, I am sure that Eisenhower would not have been unhappy to go to the Summit and propose his open skies proposal having the knowledge that a few days before we had made a flight, and having the knowledge that the man across the table knew that this flight had taken place, but neither one of them say anything about it.

CITRON: Isn't that giving him an awful lot of credit for something very Machiavellian, when he knew he had the potential, that you'd been flying these flights along the border of the Soviet Union right along; they knew you were flying around the border, so just the fact that you hadn't gone over the border really couldn't have been that important, though.

POWERS: Well, I don't know that it was that important, but this is just a speculation that I have. I feel that the flight itself and the photography that would have come back was important enough justification for the flight. And these--the timing of the thing is the thing I don't understand. I don't know why it was just before the Summit Conference. This--in fact the one previous to that was, oh, April the 9th, which was just a little more than a month before.

So we hadn't had flights in, oh, quite a few months, and then all at once just before this conference there's two. I don't know what the reason was.

CITRON: Um-hum. I'd like to start at the beginning. One other question, though, before we start with your training and your recruitment to the Agency from the Air Force. A large part of the middle part of the book describes when you're in jail in the Soviet Union, and you roomed with this man that became very friendly to you, and at one point in the book, as you were released, you wrote a letter which was returned unanswered, wasn't it? Or it was returned to parents(?) answered. It was not...?

POWERS: No, I sent a return receipt--

CITRON: You got the receipt back but no answer.

POWERS: Yes. And no answer, but there was a signature that I'm sure was his.

CITRON: Well, how do you explain that, and has there been any further contact since?

POWERS: No, there hasn't, and I don't know. I guess....

CITRON: ...wasn't it?

POWERS: Zugorge(?).

CITRON: Yeah.

POWERS: And I guess the only way I can explain it is that I probably waited too long to write. I feel badly about this.

CITRON: I don't quite understand why--you mean that you hadn't written earlier, or he might answer you?

POWERS: Well, I'm wondering. He could have probably used a letter while he was still in prison. And it would have--letters are very important in a situation like this. And when I came back to this country, I asked for permission--see, I was still working for the CIA.

CITRON: They didn't want you to write?

POWERS: No, they said it would look odd for me to be carrying on a correspondence with someone behind the Iron Curtain, and I can concede that point. It would look a little odd. But he was a friend, and I feel that I should have done this.

CITRON: Well, now, Gary, the story starts when you were in the Air Force; and you had some clandestine meetings with the CIA, which you keep referring to in the book as 'the Agency'. What made your mind up to join the Agency without even knowing what was coming?

POWERS: Before even contracts were signed I knew what was coming, but I decided for more than one reason. The first thing they told me, it'd be a new and different aircraft, which is always exciting to a pilot. The next thing was that later on during the negotiations or interviews we came to the point to where we knew what the mission would be. And the mission was flying over Russia. It wasn't any of this border stuff. This was what we were there for.

And what we were going to do.

And I felt so proud that we at this time would undertake something like this, that--well, my estimation of our government and my country went up a great deal at that time, because I had felt up to this time that we were being pushed around a little more than I liked.

CITRON: The money that they offered you for this--to leave the Air Force and retain your grade and time and everything--was, I think, $2500 a month.

POWERS: Yes, that's right.

CITRON: And this was what? At least double or triple your Air Force salary?

POWERS: It was probably four times more. And I didn't refuse it. I had my mind made up to take this before I knew what the pay was, but this is something that wasn't brought out when they tried to make a mercernary out of me. But one thing that people don't realize is that the Lockheed test pilots at that time flying the same aircraft over Southern California were paid at least twice this much. Even there he's depending on the bonuses and the flights and so forth.

CITRON: After your training on the U-2 in the desert, I thought it was a very interesting note that they sent you over to England and the English kicked you out, lock stock and barrel.

POWERS: Well, this was another group; it wasn't the group I was in.

CITRON: That went...?

POWERS: Yes.

CITRON: You might mention that.

POWERS: Well, they were finished training when I got to--

CITRON: Group I.

POWERS: Group I. Yes, when I got to the area there, and they had left, and we came in and started training. Well, they went to England, spent a few months there, and I guess the British took one look at this black looking airplane and said, "We want no part of that." I don't know what their reasoning was, but anyway they had to move to Germany.

CITRON: And then when you, the Group II got to Germany, that became compromised. You--

POWERS: No, this is still Group I, when they went to Germany. Group II only went to Turkey.

CITRON: I see, but Group I was compromised in Germany.

POWERS: Yes. Well, they originally started at Wiesbaden, which is--the Air Force base is surrounded by city just about, and it's quite open, and every time a plane like this would take off, it was quite noticeable. Then they moved to a place called Liebes-stod , and there it had been noted this black limousine on several occasions looking around and watching and so forth; and when it was checked into, it didn't belong to a nation that was friendly to the United States.

CITRON: Um-hum. Well, anyway they shipped you out, and your first spot was Turkey.

POWERS: That's right.

CITRON: What was the name of the town? Adana?

POWERS: Adana.

CITRON: Adana. And the arrangements there were quite

primitive, and you trained how long there?

POWERS: Well, we didn't have any overflights immediately upon arrival because the planes came in crates and had to be put together and testflown and then we were ready.

CITRON: Why couldn't they have flown them there? They did fly across the Atlantic--

POWERS: Oh, this was later when we became less security conscious. At first no one ever saw this plane except when it was absolutely necessary, and when we moved from one place to another rather than getting involved with logistics, you know, and stopping here and refueling and going through--they'd just take the wings off, stick it in a larger aircraft, fly it, and then put it back together. And it only took a few hours to do this.

CITRON: Um-hum.

POWERS: Well, a few hours. I mean within a couple of days.

CITRON: Well, how long before you started flying around from Turkey?

POWERS: Let's see, I got there in--early in August. I don't remember the exact date.

CITRON: This was August of '56.

POWERS: '56. And we started flying missions out of there local flights around in September, October. The first flight of any importance that I had was in November.

CITRON: And this went on for a period of several years.

POWERS: Yes.

CITRON: And this is where you were--and one of the news items today on that would be that the spying that you were doing was mostly on the friendly powers.

POWERS: Well, there was a lot of it. Friendly? I don't know. I think in this day and age, it's necessary to know what's going on. Especially when within just moments of pressing a button an ICBM can come at you. We flew over several of the Middle Eastern countries. And I saw a war start around the Suez one time.

CITRON: That would be '58?

POWERS: '57--'56, '57.

CITRON: Yeah.

POWERS: I'm hazy over the years there.

CITRON: But everything was building up towards the primary mission which would not take place for a few years later.

POWERS: Oh no, we were doing the primary mission also. This was just extra--

CITRON: Well, I thought the primary mission was the overflight of the Soviet Union.

POWERS: There was more than one overflight of the Soviet Union. And the Russians know of, I think probably all of them. I don't know, but this was why we were there. We flew several from where we were. I'm sure the people in Germany flew several from where they were. You know, this--and then they moved down--

CITRON: But there hadn't been any precisely from Pakistan to Norway, had there?

POWERS: No. No, these were just flights in and out. You know, just a few miles, a few hundred miles.

CITRON: But the real piece de resistance they were saving up for you.

POWERS: No, no. This is--it just so happened that this was the first time that this flight--a flight like this--

CITRON: This was--

POWERS: --had started completely across the Soviet Union. Now this flight had been planned years before. I'd seen it, but it had never been okayed. I don't know for what reason it had never been okayed, because I would think it was quite an important flight. It hit places deeper inside, probably, than had ever been hit before.

CITRON: One--on this flight, you described how you'd turn on and off your equipment, and how one of the places that you thought you might as well--they might as well get again was the launching site, but you intimated that this had been hit....

POWERS: Oh, we'd flown over this before. This was very important when we discovered their--the Russian concentration on ICBM's rather than bombers. And I think the U-2 has credit for exposing this hoax they were pulling on the Western world.

CITRON: Flybys(?).

POWERS: Yes, they'd have five airplanes, but they'd be seen in a hundred different places, so we thought they had a thousand. And we proved differently and found out that they were concentrating on missiles. And then we immediately, you know in the late 50's started building missiles.

CITRON: Francis Gary Powers, we'll be back in a moment for more talk about "Operation Overflight", but we must pause now for network identification.

* * *

CITRON: Here at the Algonquin I'm talking with Francis Gary Powers. It was May Day, 1960, just before the Summit that the White House itself authorized your fly over the Soviet Union, where it was time you were--had the nearmiss from the missile which brought

the plane down. And I was trying to think, throughout your interrogation by the Russians, and throughout the book, you are successful in maintaining the myth that the plane was shotdown at approximately, what, 68,000 feet was it? I've forgotten.

POWERS: Yes, that's the figure that I told them.

CITRON: Is the altitude that the plane can go to still classified today?

POWERS: I really don't know whether it's classified or not, but just on the off chance that it could help an enemy--and the planes are still flying today--just on the off chance that it could help someone shoot one down one of these days, if it's ever necessary to use them in this capacity again, I don't mention it in the book, and I will not mention this.

CITRON: Well, it's obvious from what you say that the ceiling is a good deal above that. Or, you know, it wouldn't be--that wouldn't be so. I thought that one of the biggest mistakes that the CIA made was that they didn't--and you say this in the book--they made no real provision, what happens if the plane goes down, if you're flying over Russia. They gave you a hunting knife and a pin with some poison on it and said nothing more.

POWERS: Well, we didn't discuss this to the length that we should have. I think they regret that as much as I do. But I still feel, just here again, an interesting speculation, because it's very difficult to get some of this information. Eisenhower in his memoirs stated that he felt--he and two other people only in the whole of government who was in on this program believed that the Soviet Union would admit that we had been doing this. So if a plane went down--it was shot down or just landed or whatever, they

would be ashamed to admit it and would not even say a word about it.

So, with this in mind, why should you spend the time training someone for--if he's never going to be heard from again?

CITRON: One of the--at one point you asked for clarification about what happens if you're captured, and somebody in the CIA said to you, "You might as well tell them everything you know, because they'll get it out of you anyway." But actually, this really wasn't so, because while you were questioned at great length, like a thousand hours, there never was any torture, or there was never any way of getting things out of you like you didn't want to give, such as the altitude of the plane.

POWERS: Well, it was so that I was told this, yes, but this is not what I did, because I felt that I had some information that would be much more valuable to them--so valuable to them that I just wouldn't indulge it--you know, give...

CITRON: ...cover(?) information.

POWERS: Well, that's one thing. They probably were further advanced than we were, and my knowledge was old, so I don't know, but the flights over the Middle Eastern countries, they would have made a lot more propoganda with this than they did with just their--the trial that we had. And what the altitude of the airplane, the names of some people, and other things that could have embarrassed the country more.

CITRON: Francis Gary Powers, after reading the way you conducted yourself at the trial and the 21 months in prison, I thought you did great. Where was the lack of communications that made you out in the United States to be rather a fool and a dupe?

POWERS: I don't know. Now, you say this--you're one of the few people who have said that, and I was in quite an embarrassing situation. I would have rather been anywhere else than in Moscow at that time. But the trial went, and I did--

CITRON: Well, you'll never get a visa.

POWERS: (LAUGHS OBSCURES)... But the trial was conducted, and I think it was planned, and I think the Soviets did accomplish their purpose with it, embarrassing the United States. But I felt that I had done a fairly decent job, and I was even a little bit proud of myself by being able to withhold some of the information that I did, because I didn't--I don't know how I would react to torture. And I expected it. But anyway, when I came back to this country, after the exchange, this is when all of the....

CITRON: When they exchanged you for Colonel Abel, the socalled superspy.

POWERS: Yes. This was when all of everything I read in the newspapers and heard on the radio and television seemed to be anti-Powers. Now, where it got started I don't know. I know that government agencies made a lot of press releases, and I think people -- or a lot of the media maybe took out on me the fact that some of the stories they had been told in 1960 were proven lies. And I'm sure they don't like being lied to, anymore than anyone else. I don't know why all of this happened at that time.

CITRON: Well, you say in your book that perhaps it happened because some people mistakenly thought that you were under oath or something, that you should have not only destructed the plane, which you talk about in the book, which couldn't be done, but you should have killed yourself.

POWERS: Yes, well this--a lot of people thought this apparently. Some of the articles that I read said this; I received, I guess, six or eight letters that people said that "you should have used the needle; you're a traitor," and all of this. And of course all the while I was under no orders to use this needle. I took it along just--actually because it was a new gadget--was the prime reason I think. And I knew that I wasn't supposed to kill myself. There is no--well, the Agency, the CIA said later that I wasn't supposed to, and....

CITRON: Well, it was optional to take the needle along, as a matter of fact.

POWERS: Yes. I didn't have to have it, and an interesting thing, I ran into my first commanding officer the other night, and he was telling someone that of the cyanide tablets which we had earlier and had an option to take, that none of the pilots took them; so I'm not the only one that did not take these things along on these flights. No one had ever taken one. But when we had this new little gadget, beautiful little thing(?)--could be used as a weapon and so forth, it was an intriquing device, and when he offered it to me, sure, I took it. It has caused a lot of controversy, apparently.

CITRON: Can you describe to us a little bit about the 21 months in prison? Because you do it so well in the book, and it certainly was a tough life.

POWERS: Yes, that was one of the toughest periods of time I'd ever spent, and it'll be difficult to describe.

CITRON: Ten years was your sentence, wasn't it? Ten years.

POWERS: No, ten years with three years in prison and seven in a work camp. But I was in the prison the whole time that I was there, which was 21 months. I guess just monotony, boredom, fear--I don't know, it would be difficult to describe those--condense those 21 months down in just a few words.

CITRON: Actually, the--as we started out, it was made a lot more bearable with this man that you shared your cell. Perhaps you could tell us a little about that man.

POWERS: Yes, his name was Zugordj Kulich(?), and he was a Latvian, and he has a history that would just make a story that would really sell. I mean this man really had a history. Briefly he left Latvia with the Germans fighting the Russians, because the Russians had conquered Latvia before the Germans came in, so he felt that the Germans were liberators, left with them, fighting the Russians, when they were pushed back into Germany, was captured by the British, was a displaced person--POW, displaced person, and the recruited for British Intelligence and dropped off in Latvia as an underground agent and was captured there, and they tried him for treason, although he considered Latvia as a--not a part of the Soviet Union. Very interesting story and a very fine person.

CITRON: In the beginning you considered whether he was a plant or not.

POWERS: Yes, well I--they asked me if I wanted a cellmate, and since boredom and monotony is one of the worst enemies in a prison, I would think, if I could get one that spoke English, then maybe I could learn some Russian and we could talk, play chess, and I chose to have one. And this man's English was rusty at the time,

but he picked it up real soon; and anyone they would have given me for quite a length of time would just have to be a plant, I assumed. But after months and months and knowing him and seeing the things that he'd accumulated over his several years in prison, if he were a plant, boy he certainly earns his pay.

CITRON: Did you feel that the Russians had gotten out of you everything they wanted?

POWERS: No, they kept trying to get other information, and they wanted me to admit things and say things that I would not say. Now, here is something that I'm quite angry about, and I do bring it out in the book. My defense attorney said things for me that I did not authorize him to say. He tried to get me to say them; I wouldn't say them, so he would get up in my defense and say them. And there was very little I could do about it; in fact nothing I could do about it. But I did not know that he was going to say these things.

CITRON: Gary, tell our audience your defense attorney's track record.

POWERS: (LAUGHS) Well, I--

CITRON: It's lucky you didn't know that in the beginning.

POWERS: Oh, it is. It's too lengthy to go--but he has become very famous for losing well known cases. And--

CITRON: To(?) executions.

POWERS: Well, most, yes. He was the defendant of many of the German warcrime trials, I think, and a lot during the purges in the Soviet Union; and he and Rudenko(?) were quite a team, I think. One was always prosecutor, and one was always defense, and it always came out the same.

CITRON: Beria he lost to execution.

POWERS: Yes, um-hum.

CITRON: As most of his other clients. You probably got off the lightest of almost anyone he ever defended.

POWERS: Yes, and probably only because the world was watching. They were proving to the world how lenient they could be. I personally thought during this time that they would make an example of me, and a little bullet through the head as an example to other pilots, you know, don't mess around. It wouldn't have surprised me. This was a great fear of mine, that this would happen.

CITRON: Well, in fact, you were quite surprised with the--that the sentence was this relatively light, weren't you?

POWERS: Yes, I was. At first it was a tremendous relief, just to hear this ten year sentence, because I felt right up until that time that it could be death and would be. And then a few minutes later, when I really got to thinking how long ten years was, then depression set in. But at first it was a relief to hear this.

CITRON: What a way to visit the Soviet Union, I keep thinking.

POWERS: That's what this man during the exchange said to me. He said, "Next time you come and visit us, come as a friend." And I said, "Okey, I'll come as a tourist." He said, "I didn't say 'tourist', I said as a friend." He made a distinct difference.

CITRON: The final scene of your going across the bridge and Colonel Abel coming the other way, did you get a good look at him then?

POWERS: No, because I didn't know who he was.

CITRON: You had no way of knowing what was going on, did you?

POWERS: No, I did not. They did not say--I asked them why

am I being released? Just to show the world how nice we are was the answer. When I got to the other side, this friend of mine that identified me said that's Colonel Abel over there. And then I got to look from 20, 30 feet away. First time I saw the man or recognized him as--and recognized this as being an exchange.

CITRON: And the difference between your greeting and their greeting made a very touching scene. Theirs was very business like and yours of course was full of good cheer.

POWERS: Well, theirs was strictly military. I mean, right there standing at attention, two men on each side of him, on the other side. This friend of mine and I walked over to the side of the bridge, clapping each other on the back, you know, chatting back and forth. It was--there was quite a difference. I felt a little like I was breaking protocol, but I was so happy to see this man that I'm amazed I didn't kiss him.

CITRON: 21 months after it started. Or would it be longer than that, because you were in the prison 21 months.

POWERS: This was 21 months and 10 days to the date.

CITRON: Right. And now it's a little bit over ten years. May Day of 1970 was ten years.

POWERS: Yes, that's right.

CITRON: Thanks very much, Francis Gary Powers, for coming by. The book is great. I think it'll be a bestseller without a doubt. I'm glad that you finally wrote it, whether the CIA gave you permission or not, which they were wishy-washy about on a number of occasions. I think also it points out many things in the book, and it's a exciting book. And good luck to you from now on.

POWERS: Well, thank you very much.

CITRON: Don't take any more trips.

POWERS: Not that type.

CITRON: Published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, my guest Francis Gary Powers. Casper Citron reminding you to stay tuned in Monday through Friday, same time, same stations around the country, same place on the dial. From the Algonquin on West 44th Street, Casper Citron saying good night.